

**Questions, Comments, Suggestions from the Parent Information Night
March 31, 2008**

1. Excessive paper use at Indian Creek-I am concerned with the amount of paper being used to send home the newsletters at Indian Creek. It seems the principal deems it necessary to print the newsletters in English and Spanish. These newsletters are sent home with each child enrolled. Some families have multiple children attending the school. I feel it would be helpful to cut down on paper use by the use of email. Only one version of the newsletter sent (Spanish or English) and newsletter only sent to one of the attending children. There must be a way of using the enrollment database to isolate the newsletter distribution. This may be a small idea to review and address but each dollar counts at this point.

Response: Given the enrollment of families at Indian Creek who report a home language of Spanish, the state requires us to send the newsletter in both languages. This is not the principal's choice. If we collect email addresses from all families in our enrollment packet, that information can be loaded into our notification database and can be sorted by Spanish/English. For families who do not wish to give us or do not have email, the newsletter could then be sent in hard copy. We will discuss this with site staff. It will be a bit more time for office staff and the teachers to only pass out paper copies to certain students but it may save more money in paper than it costs in time.

2. Retired teachers receive benefits, although it would be great for them to keep benefits, can benefits be cut or reduced?

Retired teacher benefits are part of the teachers' negotiated contract. The District cannot, by itself, reduce or cut these benefits. It would have to be a decision on the part of the teachers to do so.

3. Charles Brown is trying to implement United Streaming. Could this same use of technology be used to "replace" books/supplies costs?

Yes, but there would be need for support staff to manage and implement this technology. Some schools are beginning to give every child a laptop and place all texts on a CD. The life expectancy, according to these schools, of the laptop is 4 years. They are stating it is a cost savings. We have not done a cost analysis or detailed research. (Please see question below)

4. Are there any needs for support in the technology department?

With the reduction the Board made from three employees and one consultant in technology to one, our list of work orders grows by the day. We are not able to resolve what each person feels is the highest priority work order in a timely fashion and we are unable to add any technology such as suggested above. There simply is no federal or state funding for technology beyond some minor programs such as Enhancing Education Through Technology for which we receive less than \$5000 per year. The Board of Trustees has made a serious commitment to enhancing technology at the schools through infrastructure upgrades, such as more bandwidth, so United Streaming and other video programs related to the curriculum work. The sites have used their site discretionary

funds to upgrade labs, buy software, etc. The sites have made the majority of purchases in technology in the past year while the District has paid for the staff to keep the equipment running.

5. Is the District using free software or are they paying for licensing?

Some of both. Sites have chosen to purchase a data management system called Edusoft, curriculum software, etc. We use commercial products which are the standard operating environment that the County Office of Education is comfortable with so that, as we connect through them to the Internet, we are compatible. We try to vet all software before it is deployed to sites as some open source (free) software (and some commercial software) does not work on our computers. This is true of all computer environments and we were given this advice by the Elk Grove School District's technology department when we opened our services.

6. What would be the savings and cost of merging with another district?

The County has a committee called the Redistricting Committee which has representatives from various school districts. They explored this idea a number of years ago and their conclusion was it would not be a cost savings. The idea has been discussed by some of the superintendents. The issue that also must be considered is that each of our communities values local control. A merged district means that a representative from your area may no longer be on the Board. The cost to any district wishing to merge with us would wipe out their savings because we have the most comprehensive and expensive health benefits in the County. The major stumbling block in a merger is all the staff in another district would have to have their health benefit package moved up to ours OR our staff would have to take a cut in order for there to be savings.

We will discuss this with the County Superintendent and ask to re-examine this issue given the current situation of declining enrollment/state cuts that all districts are experiencing.

7. What is the latest word on a limit waiver for 20:1 K-3 classes up to 21.5 or 22:1?

There is not currently any new serious talk of changing the law which penalizes you for every child over 20.44. Currently, classes of 20.5 to 21.8 may receive a reduced amount of funding on a sliding scale as follows: classes of 20.45 to 20.94 receive 80% of the funding normally paid for a class of 20; classes of 20.95 to 21.44 receive 60% of the funding normally paid for a class of 20; and classes of 21.45 to 21.84 receive 20% of the funding normally paid for a class of 20. Classes over 21.8 receive no CSR funding.

8. Is it possible or at what point can we or will we go to 30:1 or dropping down to two sites with K-4/5-8?

We will continue to do the math on the ratios and when it becomes more costly to have 20:1, the Board will begin holding meetings on the subject. If the response to the cutting of class size reduction in Elk Grove is any indication, the majority of parents may want to see other cuts before eliminating this program. That will ultimately be the Board's decision. Currently none of our sites can hold more than an additional 100 or so students. To combine sites we would need to add portables. The cost of this versus keeping a site

open needs to be explored over the coming year. That break point needs to be identified so the Board can take action when that occurs.

9. What would be the saving of half time superintendent?

Given the shortage of superintendents that is projected, it may be difficult to find a half time person. The more likely suggestion is to share a superintendent with another district. The savings would be about based upon negotiations between the individual and the two districts. This concept is being explored with neighboring districts for the coming school years.

10. What services are provided to us by the County Office of Education? How much does it cost us? Are there some county services that we can do without?

We have eliminated several services over the past few years that were not effective. Currently we pay the County for the following:

Interdistrict Mail Service (required)	\$1713
Special Education Software	212
EduSoft Data Management	7859
Emergency Service Software	247
Substitute Teacher Calling	4475
Testing Services	4361
Classified Substitute Pool	931
Consolidated Application	3206
Developers Fee Collection	1990
Internet Fee	2678
Payroll/Business Services System (QSS)	11,443
Vision/Hearing Screening	2119
Timber Coalition (to try to keep our Forest Reserve Funds)	180
OSHA Federally Mandated Posters	148
Random Drug Testing (required)	435
Special Education Transportation	25,850
Special Education One-on-One Assistants	68,896
Sports League Commissioner	500

(required to participate in middle school sports)

The various departments who benefit from these services have indicated we are at bare bones. These services are much more cost effective than hiring the personnel to complete the legally required paperwork and/or services.

11. When cuts do come, will there be opportunities for input by the MLUSD community?

Yes and No. The No answer is because of legally required deadlines that have passed or are looming for certificated and classified layoffs. As some may be aware, the School and Library Improvement Program (SLIP) income has not kept pace with salary and benefit raises. This categorically funded program, as with all other special program except special education and the cafeteria, must balance income with expenses. As it would operate in the red next year, reduction in instructional aides was approved by the

site councils at the elementary sites. Additionally, the elementary sites are restructuring based upon state mandates (Response to Intervention). This restructuring eliminates classroom aides and provides tutors. These layoffs and the effects must be, and will be, negotiated with the classified union.

The Yes answer is that the Board will be giving direction, after they receive a tentative budget next week from Cathy Schmidt, our Chief Financial Officer, in the areas to consider, beyond staff, for cuts. These will be made available on our website and written comments will be solicited. The Board will approve the budget at the June meeting but that would be too late for effective input. The May meeting is May 14 and would be the best place to respond to the proposals. Please fill out a request to speak card and turn it in to Diane Maloney prior to the start of the meeting. While the Board is unable, due to Brown Act restrictions, to respond to each question, your input will assist them in their final decisions.

12. How will you meet the requirement of 200 minutes of PE every 10 days at Indian Creek with qualified teachers?

13. I am concerned about the PE programs being cut completely from the elementary sites.

There has been no solid decision by the State on funding for next year of \$35,000 to offset the cost of PE teachers for the elementary grades. We currently add \$17,000 to the State grant to provide the program at both elementary sites. The Board will need to consider whether or not to refund the \$17,000 IF the State grant is continued, to fund the entire program, or place the responsibility back on the regular classroom teacher. If the teachers are again required to provide the instruction, it will be necessary to provide classified time to give the teachers an afternoon break based upon contractual issues. The cost of this classified "recess" supervision will be weighed against the program costs once the State has given us better direction on whether we can expect the PE grant for next year.

14. Can the music program be incorporated into the regular school day and be required for elementary 4-5?

At grade 4, all students receive music instruction as part of the school day.

At grade 5, due to the timing of sites, Indian Creek band is a before school program. At Charles Brown, it is during the school day. There are early buses that provide transportation for children to Indian Creek for the numerous before school programs. If we were able to afford a full day music teacher, it would be possible to incorporate the Indian Creek band into the school day. We only receive barely enough funding for the two periods of music at the elementary level as is. Middle School music is paid out of the unrestricted general fund.

15. I would like to see the computer instruction stepped up at Indian Creek. Among other things, students need Keyboard instruction!

The District and the School Sites have made significant improvements in technology in the last few years. Unfortunately, not all staff feels these improvements are necessary or are working the way they want. In response to the funding cuts and the dissatisfaction of some staff, the Board has chosen to significantly reduce funding to technology. To

provide more computer lab time would fall to the School Site and their School and Library Improvement budget.

16. What about grant writing to address some of these issues?

Many grants have been written. The most recent was by Dr. Sue Simpkin, our counselor, for funding for bullying reduction programs. Both sites wrote, and received garden grants. Any opportunity that comes our way, and we fit the criteria for, is considered. Many grants are now requiring a partnership with private or non-profit agencies such as the State Park grant for field improvement. We often are turned down because our demographics do not reflect high poverty. Grantors tend to want to fund schools with larger numbers of needy children. Our high test scores and low crime statistics also work against us in the grant field.

Through our membership in the Small School District Association, we are eligible for a deeply discounted subscription to Randall Funding's grant hotline. This group does grant work for major cities, counties and school districts. For \$1200 per year, they will send us a list of available grants customized to our specification. Included in this price is a review, by their grant writers, of any grants we write. For about ½ of the cost of other services, they will write major grants for us. Grant writing fees may not, normally, be paid out of a grant and Randall Funding does not work on contingency. This is a difficult year to find \$1200 in the budget but may be worth the expense. The Board will be considering this.

17. I want to know that since the kindergarten aides have been pink slipped from Indian Creek and have been paid through Site Council in the past if they are brought back can their salaries not be included in the site council as I think the problem would continue for year to come.

As some may be aware, the School and Library Improvement Program (SLIP) income has not kept pace with salary and benefit raises. This categorically funded program, as with all other special programs except special education and the cafeteria, must balance income with expenses. As it would operate in the red next year, reduction in instructional aides was approved by the site councils at the elementary sites. Additionally, the elementary sites are restructuring based upon state mandates (Response to Intervention). This restructuring eliminates classroom aides and provides tutors. These layoffs and the effects must be, and will be, negotiated with the classified union.

There is no strong, statistically valid evidence that classroom aides have a significant effect on student achievement. This issue has been hotly debated/studied across the country for many years. The federal programs long ago began to push schools to hire credentialed teachers as the result of these studies. The School and Library Improvement Program, which is what the Site Council is responsible for, also suggests that funds be utilized for staff development, training and specialized staff rather than classroom aides. Whether you agree or disagree with the research, the salaries and benefits within these programs now exceed the income and cuts are necessary. Each Site Council is required to use best practice research and the site needs assessment to base their recommend budget upon. The budget is then approved by the Board of Trustees after a review of the information upon which the Site Council based their recommendations.

17. In a perfect world, what would be the most idealistic way to manage the schools money (without restrictions)?

There have been several major studies in California recently on this topic. The Governor is calling for a major overhaul of the entire public school system. One of the other reports looks at fully funding all the mandates from the state and providing adequate funds for schools to operate. These and other ideas may be found in the Education Excellence Report at www.californiaschoolfinance.org.

18. Please explore ways of getting all this info to parents. Educated parents and people are educated voters.

We plan to hold another information evening in May and would appreciate everyone encouraging their friends and neighbors to attend. We will broaden our invitation to include those who live in our area but do not have children in our schools. The handout and this Q&A are posted on our website. Any suggestions would be appreciated.

19. Who represents our school district on the state and federal levels? Who petitions state & federal governments for unpaid funds?

Our District is represented most immediately by Dr. Vicki Barber, our County Superintendent of Schools. She is an active participant at the state and federal levels on our behalf as a member of the County Superintendent's group and several others. We also are members of the Small School Districts' Association which pays a person to lobby our legislators in Sacramento on behalf of small schools. The Education Coalition is comprised of the Association of School Administrators, California School Boards Association, California School Business Officials Association, California Teachers' Association and the California School Employees Association. This group has banded together, despite their differences at times, to lobby for full funding of our schools.

20. Why didn't elected officials attend this meeting?

I failed to think to invite them. Thank you for the suggestion and I will send invitations to our local elected officials for the May meeting.

21. As a parent, what can we do to help support our school district. Ask each child's parents to donate 40 hours per year? I know the private school does this for their school system.

The beauty of the public school system is that it is free. This means we cannot require parents, except in specific discipline situations, to attend/volunteer. We do hope parents who are active continue to do so and more become involved. You can support your schools' parent group, become active in the Foundation which works for all the schools, volunteer, donate money, write grants, solicit local businesses for donations and write your legislators asking them to fully fund schools at a level which will be equal to the status of our economy in the world. Ask them to provide full funding for all the programs that are underfunded such as transportation, cafeterias and special education. Ask our legislators, if cuts are necessary, to only under appropriate NOT suspend

Proposition 98. An under appropriation means the State must repay those funds when the economy gets stronger. A suspension means the State does not have to repay schools.

22. Can we use students from the high school to fix our computers? What about the student teaching program at Ponderosa? Could those students help out?

The computer repair students may be available in the summer. We are working with the High School District on this. The student teaching program did not exist this past year so there are not students for us to solicit.

Thank you to everyone for their input.